Stay Safe

Help People

Boycott the Billionaires

When the Time Comes, Take to the Streets

Help Rebuild When This Is Over

Survive

SURVIVE THE TYRANT!

An RPG-style guide to living
under an oppressive regime

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The Setting: The Economics of Tyranny

And what's true for your money is also true for your labor. If you have a job that strengthens your local community, then please keep working hard. But if you work for the regime, a billionaire-owned business, or a large corporation, and you don't choose to leave that job, then slow down. Every bit of extra productivity you provide strengthens the regime. Work to rule: do exactly what is required and no more.

An authoritarian regime can be severely weakened by the combined effect of thousands or millions of people declining to comply in advance with its desires, shifting their spending to support smaller and local businesses, and refusing to do extra work for the regime and the businesses that support it. When a specific event like a general strike leads a regime to fall, people will point to that single event as the cause, but really it's the months and years of noncompliance and slow compliance by citizens that weakened the regime enough for the general strike to work.

There's a reason it's called "resistance." Like friction or the opposition to the flow of electric current, when people practice resistance they impede the progress of the regime. Eventually, when the economy grinds down, there's an opportunity for change.

> In the Soviet Union... our system was so cumbersome that it was not capable of reacting to the challenges of the science and technology revolution...
>
> It was a shame..., we were planning to create a commission headed by the secretary of the Central Committee, ...to solve the problem of women's pantyhose. Imagine a country that flies into space, launches Sputniks... and it can't resolve the problem of women's pantyhose.
>
> There's no toothpaste, no soap powder, not the basic necessities of life. It was incredible and humiliating to work in such a government. And so our people were already worked up, and that is why the dissident movement occurred.
>
> *Mikhail Gorbachev, last General Secretary of the USSR*
>
> https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/shared/minitext/int_mikhailgorbachev.html

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Getting Treasure: Family, Fun, and Art

People who lived through authoritarian regimes consistently say that family and friend relationships were crucial to their survival. People who isolated themselves generally had much worse outcomes.

It's not a coincidence that this guide is written in the style of an RPG. Getting together to play tabletop games is not just a great way to strengthen connections or an excuse for secret business. It's also fun.

Those who survived also stress the importance of art, gardening, music, and beauty. Get outdoors into nature! Finding joy and living a meaningful life while under the shadow of oppression gives the strength and resilience necessary to overcome tough moments.

Fear, division, despair, and apathy are tools of the regime. Defeat despair by continuing to live a life rich with relationships and experiences.

Quilt: *Housetop—Nine-Block Half-Log Cabin Variation*
by Lucy P. Pettway of Gee's Bend Alabama, Jim Crow era
https://www.nga.gov/stories/quilts-embody-legacy-black-america.html

Character Classes

Agitator

Protest can be an effective tool against an authoritarian regime. People need to be reminded that there is an alternative to complying with the regime. As the voice of the oppressed, the Agitator identifies the problems and injustices caused by the state.

Protest also draws regime resources and attention away from other forms of resistance. Just by being out there and loud, the Agitator makes it easier for others to perform their roles in secret.

This can be a dangerous role—by its nature it draws the attention of the regime. So it's important to be thoughtful, careful, and strategic, and to stay within the bounds set by the regime. A reckless Agitator won't last long. Listen to people with greater knowledge, training, and experience, and follow their lead. Be ready when the call comes to join in protests and public disobedience.

Community Leader

Local government officials, business owners, religious leaders, and other community leaders can play an essential role in protecting their communities. But because they do their work in public they are often placed in difficult positions—squeezed between demands made by the regime and the duties they feel to their constituents, customers, and congregations.

One of the most important things the Community Leader will do is connect people. If someone knows of someone who needs shelter and someone else can provide that shelter, the Community Leader can connect them. If someone has an interesting piece of information, the Community Leader can tell it to an Archivist/Journaler. It's safest for the Community Leader to make the connection or pass the information and then step away and not involve themselves any more than necessary.

Community Leaders can't save everyone, and they shouldn't try to. Their community already benefits tremendously from having the Community Leader in place instead of a Quisling (see page 9). It's painful to let some needs go unmet, but Community Leaders should take particular care to prioritize keeping themselves safe above any other concern.

Your Devices Are Being Tracked

The location of every mobile device is constantly tracked. When you're carrying your phone, the regime knows where you are. That's also true of everyone you interact with. One of the easiest ways to catch people who are working together is for the regime to check which phones came together and stayed in the same place for a while. If you can, leave your device at home when you meet with people.

Don't Rise to Violence

In an authoritarian regime, almost any situation will become much worse if you have a weapon in your hand. If the secret police raid your house, a weapon is far more likely to get you killed than give you any advantage. Don't rush out to buy a weapon, and above all don't buy a gun if you don't have training. If you must, get a baseball bat instead.

At protests and other gatherings, nonviolence is more effective than the alternative. If the regime initiates violence, then responding with violence only gives them license to escalate further.

Keep control of your emotions, stay calm, and keep your cool. Politeness, kindness, and humor in response to aggression can be disarming and help you avoid harm. Remember always that your main goal is to survive.

Physical Security

Assess the security of your home and your other personal spaces. Good locks are important, as are good window shades and fences that obscure sight lines. The regime may use drones, so think about what it looks like from above.

Stockpile Necessities and Make Emergency Plans

Store extra food and other necessities in case of shortages or if you need to unexpectedly take someone in. Make plans in advance and tell them to your family so if you're the one being threatened or blackmailed, you have somewhere to go and your family knows where to find you.

Transport and Sanctuary

Every authoritarian government selects groups to demonize. Regimes target racial, ethnic, and religious minorities; trans and other LGBTQ people; immigrants; the disabled; and political opponents. These people risk being harassed, intimidated, placed in internment camps, or killed. They often desperately need safe passage and a safe place to stay. By providing Transport and Sanctuary, you can directly save lives.

Opposition movements also need to move materials, messages, and key people around. Those key people need housing while they conduct business. By providing Transport and Sanctuary, you provide resources that help destabilize the regime.

The Underground Railroad

The need for secrecy was paramount as there were severe penalties for slaves and those who helped them to freedom. Therefore, railroad terminology was used to maintain secrecy and confuse the slave catchers.

The code words often used on the Underground Railroad were: "tracks" (routes fixed by abolitionist sympathizers); "stations" or "depots" (hiding places); "conductors" (guides on the Underground Railroad); "agents" (sympathizers who helped the slaves connect to the Railroad); "station masters" (those who hid slaves in their homes); "passengers," "cargo," "fleece," or "freight" (escaped slaves); "tickets" (indicated that slaves were traveling on the Railroad); "stockholders" (financial supporters who donated to the Railroad); "Freedom Trails" (the routes of the Railroad); "terminal," "heaven," or "Promised Land" (Canada and the northern free states); and "the drinking gourd" (the Big Dipper constellation—a star in this constellation pointed to the North Star, located on the end of the Little Dipper's handle).

Dr. Bryan Walls, Underground Railroad Terminology, Buffalo Toronto Public Media

https://www.wned.org/television/wned-productions/underground-railroad-the-william-still-story/stories-of-freedom/underground-railroad-terminology/

Skill and Ability Checks: How to Stay Safe

Your first priority is to stay safe.

This bears repeating. Your first priority is to stay safe. Your community needs you. And when the regime falls, your community will need you for the recovery.

Know your neighbors—friendly and not so friendly. Be aware of your surroundings. Make contingency plans. You're in occupied territory, and you can't ever let your guard down.

Communications Security

We live in a time of unprecedented communications capabilities. We have instant text messaging, social media, phones, video calls, etc.

We live in a time of unprecedented ability for governments to monitor people. The regime has incredibly powerful surveillance tools. Assume every word you write on a device—including every text—can be read by the regime. Assume that every time you send a message or make a call, they can easily find out who you contacted and when.

Face to face meetings are the best way to keep things secret. A message delivered by hand on paper, a flash drive, or an SD card is also fairly secure as long as it is destroyed after the message is received. The greatest risk happens any time a message is transmitted through wires or over the air.

It's possible to do training to improve your memory, and a message that is memorized and never written down can never be intercepted.

If you must send a message, good encryption and cryptography from apps like Signal and VPNs can help, but they're limited tools. The fact that a message was sent at all can be used against you even if the contents are secret. And even very good codes can be cracked. If you draw their attention, the regime can intercept whatever you send.

This does not mean you should stop using devices. Quite the opposite. Live your life as usual. Communicate with people using texts and social media the way you normally would. That way, when you do need to communicate with someone and meeting in person is not an option, a coded message might be missed in the sea of other communications you sent.

Adversaries

Quislings High-level government officials who abuse their power to advance the regime.

> Vidkun Quisling led a political party that tried to stop Norway from resisting the Nazi invasion in World War II. When the Germans completed the invasion, they installed Quisling as the leader of a puppet government. Ever since then, people who gain power in the government by collaborating with the regime have been known as Quislings.
>
> After the war, Vidkun Quisling was tried and executed for his crimes.

Corrupt Bureaucrats Lower-level government workers who take advantage of the regime's inherent corruption to demand bribes and line their own pockets.

Criminals As the rule of law degrades and corruption increases, scammers and violent criminals will take advantage of the lack of fair policing.

Criminals may build relationships with Corrupt Bureaucrats, and they will prey on demonized groups because they know the police will not protect disfavored people.